

Thoughts, ideas, suggestions, and rejoinders that "Freedom is not Free" is designed to provoke countrymen to take positive addition to reverse the demise of the importance of protecting, rather than slashing costs—that are the aftermath of this Memorial Day * * * and future Memorial Days to come.

Let us all utilize this sacred, heartfelt day of tribute as the starting point in reinitiating dedication to keeping our commitments to veterans and their families, by insisting that government revitalize, not kill veteran's programs, as Memorial Day 1996 approaches.

The very future of America may depend upon these veteran-related issues.

REPEALING THE 4.3 CENT GASOLINE TAX

HON. TOM A. COBURN

OF OKLAHOMA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 23, 1996

Mr. COBURN. Mr. Speaker, due to circumstances beyond my control, I was not physically able to cast my vote for H.R. 3415, which repealed the 4.3 cent gasoline tax implemented in 1993. At this time, I would like to take this opportunity to submit my opinion on this issue for the record.

Tax relief—in order to be truly effective—must do two things. First, it must be meaningful relief; people must be able to reap the benefits of Congress' actions. Second, it must be paid for with real dollars, not with creative bookkeeping or irresponsible offsets.

I am committed to tax relief. The American people are overburdened with federal, state,

and local taxes but don't see the returns for their investment. In fact, May 7, just two weeks ago, marked "National Tax Freedom Day" where people stopped handing over their paycheck to Uncle Sam and started working for themselves. Clearly, tax relief is important, necessary, and well deserved.

I do not support the 1993 decision to raise gasoline taxes 4.3 cents a gallon to finance irresponsible government spending. Dollars collected from fuel taxes should be spent only on infrastructure, not on pet projects or wasteful, duplicative federal programs. It stands to reason that ideally, the gas tax should be repealed.

But it troubles me that tax relief—in this case, repealing the gas tax—has become a political football. I do not believe people will truly benefit from this token gesture. I question the timing of the gas tax repeal: if gas taxes were too high, why didn't Congress attempt to repeal them six months ago, when the price of gasoline was at an all-time low? I find it curious that this issue has only been addressed during an election year . . . and if repeal of the tax is truly necessary, then why is it temporary? Shouldn't tax relief last beyond the 1996 elections? And how are we planning to address the loss of revenue to the federal treasury? Auctioning the spectrum is neither a real nor a responsible option. The criteria for tax cuts—meaningful relief which is paid for—have not been met.

While I disagree with H.R. 3415, I am also opposed to the Administration's "solution." Selling 12 million barrels of oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve won't lower gasoline prices—in fact, it will COST the American taxpayers \$144 million dollars. The President's

response to rising gasoline prices is politically motivated as well. This is a superficial, cosmetic action which will do nothing to truly lower gasoline prices.

Furthermore, I strongly believe that neither Congress nor the President should be in the business of regulating gasoline prices, just like the federal government should not regulate the price of other commodities like wheat, corn, or sugar. Instead, the market should be allowed to function. History shows that fuel prices traditionally rise in the spring but fall and level out after a few weeks. 1996 is no different. Already, consumers are watching prices go down, although not as quickly as they might like.

Mr. Speaker, had I been able to cast my vote on this piece of legislation, I would have voted "no." I cannot support a politically motivated tax cut which will not significantly aid the American consumer. This is a tax cut package tied up with pretty ribbons—but when the taxpayers open it, they see an empty box, not the true savings Congress has promised.

I feel this is another example of election-year politics, not genuine reform. I want to tell the people of Oklahoma's second district that Congress reduced their tax burden, but I want them to be able to see the difference in their bankbook at the end of the month. I cannot vote for a gimmick which makes politicians look good but doesn't actually help the people who put them in office. I don't believe that temporarily repealing the 1993 gasoline tax will do much to lift the tax burden from the shoulders of the American people; therefore I cannot support it.